

(U) Zelda Column: Private Chit-Chat Goes Public

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

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(U) Editor's note: The below article is unclassified in its entirety.

Dear Zelda,

Some coworkers and I have been exchanging messages that we, up until recently, believed to be private. In these messages, we said some embarrassing things about mutual acquaintances, including comparing one female coworker of ours to Teflon and another pair of upper-level managers as "Batman and Robin." Unfortunately, these messages weren't private after all: someone posted them onto NSANet! :(Now everyone hates me and my coworkers. What can we do to make people like us again?

-- Secret No Longer in SID

Dear Secret No Longer,

Who among us hasn't done something like this? It's mortifying when it happens, but once it's out there, the damage is done. At least you can be thankful that you didn't say anything really egregious or grounds for an EEO complaint. In time, people will forget about it and move on. But meanwhile, here's what you can do.

Apologize to the people you bad-mouthed if you know (or are reasonably certain) they have seen the postings. Make it a prompt and sincere apology, and don't make excuses for your bad behavior (such as blaming the person who posted it). Be humble. Grovel, if necessary. And might I also suggest you do not do this via e-mail? Call or talk to them in person. If all else fails, bring them a grande caramel macchiato. (I'd forgive you!)

If they haven't seen the messages and you can pull them back to spare their feelings, do so immediately. And take this as a lesson to not send electronically anything you wouldn't want to get back to the person being talked about.

Shame on the person who posted your exchanges! It was not only rude to the originators, but probably served to hurt the subjects' feelings. Who would do such a thing?

A word to the wise: for those of you prone to e-mail gaffes with similar results, such as accidentally Replying to All, you might consider removing the Reply All button from your Outlook toolbar. You will still be able to get to that feature (under Actions), but it will be harder to find and you won't hit it by accident.

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In conclusion, the best way to make people like you is to not say unflattering things about them in the first place -- and **never** put them in writing. That would be a good new year's resolution for us all.

Wishing you good judgment and smooth SIGINT sailing in 2011,

Edna
